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OUTLOOK TRAVEL SERIES

FOUR MONTHS IN ITALY IN WAR-TIME

BEATRICE THOMPSON

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FOUR MONTHS IN ITALY IN WAR-TIME

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BY BEATRICE THOMPSON

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FOUR MONTHS IN ITALY IN WAR-TIME

CHAPTER I

OUTWARD BOUND

"WHAT is it to you, all ye that pass by?" The War—the Great War—what is it to you, oh ye careless ones? Ye idlers in the market-place, ye shirkers and pleasure lovers, who are content to let the heroes die or suffer, and the women weep and work? Do ye heed its awful warning, and hear, ere it be too late, the Master's call for fresh workers in the vine-yard?

And the War, what is it to you, ye men and women, who are a little tired, a little sad, a little discouraged with fate and fortune, who, seemingly, have little now to lose or

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gain, whose ambitions are dead, and who yet, maybe, are humble, and patient, and strong to endure, and willing to help and serve others to life's end in a long quiet sequence of days of small things. Ye men and women, who slip out of the eager rush of the crowd of the young and valiant, of the loud-voiced enthusiasts, of the skilful, wise administrators of mercy and charity, of the sailors, the soldiers, the nurses, the diplomats, in short, of all who have the hand to the plough. Ye men and women who stand on the "side-walks" of life, with love and sympathy in your hearts, and patient hope in the final triumph of right and truth and justice, what means the War to you, ye whose only comfort, in your silent watch, is the thought that

"He also serves who only stands and waits"?

Let a woman, who is no longer young, yet strong and active, a lover of peace and work, and faithful service for God and man, but whom fate has turned into a looker-on at life, try to tell you what such a one may observe from her quiet posts of vantage of the mighty

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upheaval of the hearts and minds of all Europe.

England declared war with Germany on the 4th August, 1914. Till the 23rd September, 1916, I had remained in a little west-country town, working quietly with many other women of any social rank for a branch of Queen Mary's Guild, making clothing for the trenches in Salonica, and bandages and surgical aids for the wounded. Church choirs were emptied of singers; all the brave and England-loving men and lads had long since gone to the front. Lengthy rolls of honour were read out at badly attended intercession services in all the churches. Aeroplanes flew over the town frequently from Salisbury Plain. A great munition factory was filled with workers. Thirty Belgian refugees had been received into homes in the town, and work for all had since been found. Married men were being "called up." Women and girls were carrying round mails and milk, milking cows, and working on the land. After sunset windows were covered, and all lights put out in the streets "by order," for fear of Zeppelins.

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On the 23rd September, I went up to London. The trains and platforms were crowded with soldiers. Five airships hovered above the White City. Public picture galleries and museums were closed. The streets were darkened at night, but, by day, swarming with men in khaki—English, Irish, Scotch, Welsh, Anzacs! Khaki everywhere! Fine, sturdy girls, in sensible uniforms, were acting as conductors of motor-buses, and women in loose trousers as house-painters and window-cleaners. The shop windows were as attractive as ever. There was bustle and life everywhere in London, with a sense of excitement and youthful pleasure in the air. On all sides one met cheerful and cheery faces, with signs of hopefulness and good nature. Why not? The waves of War no longer ebbed and flowed with the old disheartening monotony on the Western and Eastern fronts. The women of England had answered to their country's call, and had helped nobly and steadfastly to supply their heroes in the trenches with the grievously delayed munitions. The "Great Push" had begun!

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There was sign of warlike unrest everywhere. At night, searchlights flashed over the Metropolis, or darkness reigned, followed by the sound of anti-aircraft guns. Book shops and stalls were crowded with volumes and illustrated papers dealing with the War. Every one was talking of the destruction of two Zeppelins by *sunlight* in English fields, or of Belgian or Serbian massacres to be avenged. Everybody was praising and glorying in the pluck and good temper of our splendid Tommies, and the hundreds of brave lads who led them to nearly certain death, ever ready and proud to lay down their lives for their friends and their King, for Britain and honour! At Trafalgar Square and Westminster groups of bandaged, convalescent wounded soldiers watched the "passing" from their hospitals.

I was proposing to accompany my brother and his wife to their home at Florence, the great war hospital centre of Italy.

After being held up in London for several days, because no boats were running in the Channel, owing to the presence of German

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submarines, and considerable difficulties in obtaining the *visé* to my passport at the British War Permit Office, we started for Southampton on the 30th September, the train passing through long stretches of country covered with military camps. After an hour in the crowded dock waiting-room our passports were examined and our luggage passed unopened by the custom-house officers, because my brother was wearing the badge of the British Red Cross Society in Italy, of which he happened to be the honorary treasurer and secretary for Florence.

A curious incident occurred during our tiresome wait. My sister-in-law, being an experienced traveller, decided that it would be much wiser to make no attempt to get our luggage passed early, as we should only weary ourselves by standing long in a very uncongenial crowd, and lose all chance of sitting down. So we retired to the very back of the room, and found some places on a bench against the wall. We each had a book with which to deceive ourselves that time was passing quickly.

I had put some light hand baggage by me on

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the seat, but, on seeing some one approach, as if in search of somewhere to rest, I mechanically put out my hand, and transferred it to the ground, meanwhile continuing to read. I noticed that a somewhat unkempt youth sank down on the bench beside me, holding in trembling hands a form, similar to one which I had just filled up, concerning identity, nationality, and destination of travellers. But soon, to my dismay, he turned to me, and asked in a thick voice:

"Have you ever been in France?"

"Several times when I was young," I replied.

"Do you know if they give you those white heady wines to drink wherever you go?" he asked.

"I have had very little experience," I answered, "as I always drink water, wherever it is wholesome, but I believe one can get a good red serviceable wine everywhere in France."

I was on tenter-hooks, and glanced at my sister-in-law's disapproving face; but I did not see how to get rid of my neighbour, who sighed continually, and put his elbows on his knees, while the paper shook in his hand.

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"Do you think I am drunk?" he asked.

I gave him a searching look, and hesitated.

"For pity's sake tell me, am I drunk?" he pleaded. "Oh, Lord! what shall I do if they won't let me go on board?"

"I do not think you are drunk now," I said slowly. "But I am afraid you have been drinking."

"It's awful," he burst out in a passion. "I've disgraced myself, and it's my last chance. I was going abroad to enlist in the Foreign Legion, and I promised not to drink again. But some fellows in the train made me drink some of those confounded white wines, and I've been drunk all the way from London."

"Hush!" I said, feeling there was no escape for me, and that I had to get through an unpleasant scene as best I could. "Try not to get excited, but just tell me quietly about your trouble, and why you are so anxious to enlist in the Foreign Legion."

He tore open his coat, and dragged several papers out of the inner pocket.

"There, read that," he said. "It's about my

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brother, who's just been killed. He was a hero, and we're all proud of him, while I am the disgrace of the family. His superior officer wrote about his glorious death to his Oxford tutor, and the letter is from the tutor, breaking the news to my father, and saying all sorts of splendid things about him."

I read the letter, and returned it to him, saying:

"It is indeed sad news! Yet what an honour it must be to die for one's country!"

"Were *you* at Oxford?" I asked, after a pause.

"No," he said. "I went first to one school, and then to another, as no one would keep me for long."

"Where is your home?" I asked.

He told me, and added:

"It's not my fault; it's inherited. My family is under the curse of drink. My father's all right, and so was my brother, and it jumped two generations, and pitched on me. My people have sent me to one sanatorium after another, but it's of no avail. Over and over

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again, I make up my mind never to drink, but I always fall at the first temptation, and it's no good trying any more."

"Yes, indeed, *indeed* it is of use trying," I urged. "Never mind if you fail next time, but try again, and, remember, if you are sorry and ashamed of having disgraced yourself, as long as you are capable of feeling shame, there is hope for you. So cheer up, and promise me now that you will try again."

"You are kind to me, and help me more than you know," he said gratefully. "And I do promise to try for your sake."

Then to change his thoughts, I told him that I was a Londoner, but had been living for several years at —— in Somersetshire.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "Do you know the Rev. Sidney C——?"

"Yes," I answered. "He was the Vicar of Christchurch, but he has a living near Oxford now."

"Well, I was at College with two of his sons in Canada. They were nice fellows."

Then, to cheer him, I told him of a curious

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interview I had had with this clergyman's brother when, as an art student, I was painting a copy of part of the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum, and how this gentleman wrote books for boys, and liked my work so much that he had asked me to illustrate a story for him.

"When my brother was killed," he said, "I was in a sanatorium in Canada, but at the news of his death I came straight away, meaning never to drink again, and to enlist in the Foreign Legion, and get killed, and, then," he added bitterly, "I would be no more a disgrace to my family. Oh, what am I to do with this paper?" he asked abruptly.

"Fill it up," I said.

"Oh, dear! I don't know what to do, my hands shake so. Would you mind filling it up for me?" he entreated.

"Yes, I will do it," I said, "if you will tell me exactly what to write."

Then he burst into a fit of despair, lest the authorities would not let him go on board, but to get rid of him I advised him to go and ask a

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certain policeman if it were filled up correctly. We shook hands, and he went; and, luckily, his seat beside me was instantly taken by a weary woman, and I had to submit to a lecture. Soon my brother joined us.

"Oh, what shall we do?" exclaimed my sister-in-law. "We shall have all the riff-raff of Europe fasten on us, because of Trix, and her *painfully* kind face."

When we had briefly explained the matter to him, my brother said the young man need not be afraid he would not be allowed to cross, no matter how drunk he was, if only he said he was going to join the Foreign Legion, and I was sternly commanded on no account to take any notice of him on the boat. Twice next day, I saw him gazing at me in dumb sorrow, with eyes like those of a dog that has been whipped, and once my brother said:

"Your respectable acquaintance has been drinking again."

However, at Havre, I saw him get safely and triumphantly through the passport difficulties.

Notwithstanding his terrible weakness, he

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loved England and honour, and I doubt not that, long ere this, he has found a hero's grave somewhere in France, having fought for England and honour, and who knows, perchance, his father should feel more proud of this poor prodigal than of the son who was never tempted by his hereditary vice ?

Once on board, we were told that we must sleep in dock, and no one could say when the boat would sail. Owing to the crowd, I offered a second bunk in my cabin to a lady, whose acquaintance we had made in the train. I had the upper bunk, but could not sleep much, for all night long there was tramping a few feet above my head, and what wonder, for the little *Hantonia* had 226 beds too few to accommodate the passengers ! What a strange, rough, polyglot crowd, and what a horror of human kind and wild nature if a panic had arisen ! Besides a few British and French officers, an anxious mother and friend accompanying a wounded and barely convalescent young officer, *en route* for the South of France, a clever, war-wise captain and two ladies of the Red Cross in

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charge of the first detachment of twenty British women—nineteen about to visit their husbands, and one to marry her fiancé in Switzerland, none having met since the outbreak of the War—there were on board a crowd of low-class Italians, called up to "join their colours," Belgians, French, and two Japanese, though on Sunday in a horrible crush, in the attempt to get to tea on shore, one of the latter made me gratefully aware that he had a touch of chivalry in his nature.

All day on Sunday, October 1st, we were on board. The struggle to get near the refreshment room was terrible. The unlucky, good-tempered stewards were nearly worn out by the time we eventually left England.

The *Hantonia* sailed for Havre at 9 p.m. on the 2nd October. After a hasty breakfast, we stood ready on deck to leave the *Hantonia* at 5 o'clock, but did not actually land till 7 a.m., 3rd October. Our trunks were not opened because of our Red Cross badges. We went to the railway station in a tram-car. On the train, the first-class carriages were crowded,

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but we were lucky in getting seats in a second-class carriage, where I sat between a French soldier and a Belgian lieutenant, who had picked up excellent English from the British Tommies in Flanders, and who later gave his seat to a sad sweet-faced French widow.

London streets had been full of khaki, and fashionable girls in smart short frocks. Paris was full of light blue uniforms, and every few yards one saw young widows wearing long black crape veils, reaching to the hem of their skirts, and other women with the long black veil of French mourning. There were shops filled with rings and bracelets made by soldiers in the trenches from bits of cannon, shells, etc., and shops filled with works of art made by maimed soldiers, men who were "broken for life."

Everywhere about the great station of St. Lazare was the warning posted on the walls of passages and waiting-rooms:

"Taisez-vous; les oreilles ennemies vous entendent."

Massed against the walls, were weary, dirty

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soldiers, fresh from the trenches, piled with their arms and cooking accoutrements, etc., their blue uniforms stained khaki colour with clay, propped against benches and posts, utterly worn out, and sunk in the heavy sleep of oblivion. This was a sight to bring the great conflict nearer to the mental vision of the silent observer. Truly, Paris is nearer the War than London !

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CHAPTER II

IN FLORENCE

ENTERING the Italian train on the frontier, at Modane, we found in every carriage a notice forbidding all conversation on the subject of the War, but nevertheless, we were interested by some of the experiences of a keen English "flying-man," on his way to join his ship near Salonica.

As we approached Florence, in the flushed light of evening, on the 7th of October, a captive airship, the back of its long balloon red-gold in the sunset glow, hovered over the little city, encircled by its lovely chains of hills.

In Florence, but little is seen now of the bright blue uniforms of the Italian army. The streets are full of men in steel-grey, clerical grey, and greenish-grey uniforms, of various dull tints, either with capes of similar colour or

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greatcoats a little browner than khaki. Nearly all ladies' hats are black, with perhaps a touch of colour in them, and the dresses, when not for mourning, are usually navy blue, or sober, neutral colours.

Book-shop windows are full of war literature, and drapers', with wool for the army. There are soldiers everywhere, for even the men of 1876 are being called up. Red Cross motor-ambulances are continually busy discharging their pitiable and most honourable loads at the many military hospitals.

One Sunday, in November, on my way home from the English church, where I had been to Communion, I was delayed at a level crossing by the slow passage of a Red Cross train, packed with five hundred wounded men. Some smiled merrily at the silent, awe-stricken little crowd at the gates of the barrier, but I saw many a young face ivory white and still, the pallor strangely enhanced by the black hair and beard that framed it, while the sad eyes gazed languidly from under the window blind, raised slightly above the face of the recumbent soldier.

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Alas, what did the blinds which were lowered hide from us? And what of those poor bandaged faces, at which none will ever again rejoice to look? For each of those defaced beings we may pray that some day he will "awake in His likeness, and be satisfied." Truly, the White Comrade is ever near these men, and to the two or three who may be gathered together in His name, to intercede for them and for us.

On my way to and from the city, I passed a great building, called the "Collegeo," a boys' school which has been converted into a military hospital. Sometimes, on hearing the exclamation, "Per gentilezza, signorina," I looked up, and saw windows and balconies filled with patients with white night-caps on their heads, and then post cards and letters come fluttering down for me to drop into the box at the entrance to the building.

And the Great War—what does it mean to the Italian peasant? Many of the *podere*, or farms, are owned by an English, American, or Italian proprietor, who may, or may not, live

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in the Villa on the estate. He provides the agricultural implements, and halves the profits with the *contadini*, or peasants, who live in the *casa colonica*—the farm-house—the same family, in most cases, having lived in it for many generations.

Sometimes the *contadini* actually own the *podere*. This is the case with a *podere* here in Fiesole. The six sons have been forced by conscription to go to the War, so the broken-hearted father and mother will be obliged to sell their patrimony, for how can two old men, one bed-ridden, and the other doubled up over two sticks with rheumatism, two women, and a little child, cultivate the vines and olives, and plough the heavy clayey soil of Tuscany ?

And the Italian upper class—what is the Great War to it ? Some of its members, no doubt, take it seriously enough, and do their duty to their country, but what is it to the many, who put their hands in their pockets, while English men and women go about in shabby clothes, that all the money they can spare may go to help the Italian soldiers with clothing and tender

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care? Why, only last Friday—8th December, 1916—a Florentine marchese, who lets a floor of his family mansion to an English lady, was furiously enraged with her, because his noble staircase is polluted by the passage up and down of women carrying parcels to and from the door of this lady, who is one of the devoted workers for the British Red Cross Society in Italy. And those parcels contain clothing for the Italian wounded soldiers, who fight, and fall, and suffer on Alpine snows, clothing, bought with English money, by English men and women, who have found homes in Italy, and owe love to the land which is giving them hospitality, and the same gratitude to the Italian heroes, who are holding back the Austrian invaders, as we all owe to our own glorious Tommies, who are stubbornly facing the Huns on our own front.

Not only do many members of the Italian upper class refuse to help their own hospitals, or the men at the Front, or their impoverished families, in any way, but any superior officer at the front, or a young tenente-medico—surgeon-

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lieutenant—is liable to decline the invaluable British aid sent out to them, saying they cannot be bothered with so much luxury. Meanwhile, the private soldier is often destitute, and the officers are sometimes reduced to urgent appeals to the British Red Cross Society for clothing, and bare necessities for their men, who suffer from frost-bite and all the horrors of war.

And the priests—what is the War to them? They are drawn mostly from the peasant and lower middle classes. Like the French, every priest of a certain age is liable to conscription. When called up, the clean-shaven Italian priest grows a moustache, and exchanges his cassock for a military uniform, but he can get permission to " say Mass " in any church. I met with one, who began his military career as porter at a hospital for maimed soldiers in Fiesole, and now he has some sort of secretarial work in Florence; nevertheless, he did not forget his priestly calling. At the beginning of the War, when one of the greatest festivals of the Church came round, he had stirred the heart of every patient in the hospital to make his confession,

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and to the surprise of the sister, when she entered the wards in the morning to give the men their breakfast, there was every one dressed and ready to shamble off on sticks and crutches to Holy Communion in the little chapel.

I met with another padre, who had been parish priest of a poor little suburban church in Florence, where the humble parishioners loved their tender-hearted vicar, with the gentle, low-spirited face, sometimes lighted up with a sympathetic smile, reminding one of a face in one of Luini's pictures. This man is taking the War very badly. He suffers with the sufferings of his fellows. His whole heart is in the cause of his country, and is torn with anguish at the thought of desolate homes and broken lives. Poor as he is, he has paid a priest to take duty at his church, and he has offered himself to his country, his soul fired with ambition to get to the front, to say Mass for the soldiers, to solace the dying with the last rites of the Church, to help the wounded, and to bury the dead. But, alas, he has no influential friends to push his

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cause! He belongs to Class III, and he cannot get to the Front!

He finds himself exiled from his beloved church, wearing the military uniform, and acting as secretary to the Dominican chaplain of three Hospitals for the Maimed. When I first saw him, he seemed broken down with a great sorrow; crushed and dumb, pale and emaciated, his eyelids red, as if he had been crying. As the days and weeks passed, he grew a little more cheerful, and gently playful with the worthy Dominican nuns, as he passed through their *guardaroba*, and sometimes he had covered his uniform with the white pinafore of a *medicazione* assistant. One Sunday, while I was hearing the Prior of the Dominican Monastery sing a fine requiem mass in his parish church on the mind-day, the anniversary of a soldier's death in battle—on which occasion little leaflets bearing the portrait of the dead hero, with a short record of him, were given to the worshippers—I saw the gentle padre, in a gorgeous chasuble, saying his silent low Mass in a side chapel.

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On the 12th January, 1917, I happened to be wandering round the lovely old Tuscan Gothic church of Santa Trinità, "*la sua Dama*" —"the lady love"—of Michelangelo, filling my mind with the contrasts of brilliant sunshine and deep, mysterious shadows under the many lofty arches and recesses of nave, aisles, transepts, and chapels, and gladdening my eyes with Domenico Ghirlandajo's beautiful frescoes, and my soul with the loveliness of the legend. I stood beneath the miraculous crucifix of San Giovanni Gualberto, the founder of the Vallombrosan Order of Monks, who told how, once, when the saint was praying before his crucifix, the Figure on the Cross bent forward and kissed him, because in those old days of cruel revenge San Giovanni had bridled the impulse of his hot Italian blood, and had spared the murderer of his brother.

Two Masses, both well attended, were being celebrated in the church, yet I noticed that many people approached a table covered with books, pamphlets, and various small objects, in the centre of the nave. Finally, I, too, drew near,

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and found it to be an exhibition of a field altar, chalice, and all the priestly vestments and necessaries needed by a priest-soldier at the Italian front. Also, for visitors to take away with them, was a pile of printed leaflets, of which the following is a translation :

"FOR THE CAMP ALTARS

"Since the beginning of the War, the number of priest-soldiers has gone on ever increasing. Now there are about 25,000, the larger proportion at the Alpine front, the others in the Balkan camps.

"Many of these priests, for months together, are unable to celebrate the Holy Eucharist because they find themselves in inaccessible positions, and have in vain requested a camp altar.

"Up to the present 1500 altars have been distributed, of which a portion has been destroyed or wasted by the inevitable vicissitudes of the War.

"We need at least 800 altars to afford to our dear combatants the comfort of religious prac-

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tices in the midst of so many dangers, to procure for the soldier-priest among so many unforeseen trials the means of renewing spiritual strength in the exercise of divine service.

"We ought all to contribute: he who can give little let him give little, he who can give much let him give much; a complete altar costs 200 lire.* For such a gift one can ask to have engraved on the inside of the altar the name of the donor, or of some person, living or deceased, dear to him, so that the celebrant will read that name in memoriam.

"On the 12th January the camp altar will be exhibited from morning till evening in the Church of Santa Trinità, and at 4.30 p.m. an explanatory conference will be held by the Chiarissimo Padre Giovannozzi in order to collect offerings."

And the nuns of the various great religious nursing orders—what does the Great War mean to them? Historically, I think it means very little, for as one observed, "newspapers are

* At that time one pound sterling was worth about 34 lire.

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not for nuns," and one, I know, had never even heard of a Zeppelin! But they are ever ready with their tender sympathy, their loving care, their ungrudging labour, their watchfulness, and their knowledge of healing, their practical experience, and their strong, simple, stalwart religion to help to alleviate the pain and suffering caused by the War.

At the Dominican Hospital for convalescent maimed soldiers, who go there to wait till their poor stumps can bear the pressure of artificial limbs, there are four Dominican nuns and a lay sister to nurse, cook, and mend for the seventy-four—more or less—soldiers, who sit about in the cloisters of the convent, which was Fra Angelico's home during the twenty years of his sojourn in the monastery at Fiesole. These dear, brave women are so simple in their homely piety that one day in the earlier stages of the War, being invited out to tea in the Villa of an English lady and gentleman, on passing through the drawing-room, one of them, seeing a wall decorated with a reproduction of a Madonna and Child by some famous Old Master,

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somewhat to the embarrassment of her hosts, fell on her knees before the picture, her example being instantaneously followed by the other sisters.

Besides joining a War working-party in a friend's Villa, and doing a good deal of needle-work for the British Red Cross Society in Italy, I had the privilege of being allowed to go once or twice a week to help the Dominican Sisters in the *guardaroba* of the Hospital, my work being to mend socks, to sew on tapes and buttons, and generally repair the patients' underclothing on its return from the wash. No ironing was done, but one of the sisters and an orderly stood on either side of a long table and pulled out the sheets, etc., while various garments and handkerchiefs were pulled out by two convalescent soldiers, seated on either side of another table, with crutches under it, lying ready to support each poor man on his single leg.

To those peaceful, busy hours it was good to look forward, week by week, and now it is good to look back. One caught glimpses of lives filled with cheerful labour, self-sacrifice, self-

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effacement, gentle ready sympathy, of strong, brave characters under discipline, of lives filled with prayer, and chastened by wholesome manual labour, spiritual ardour, and love of God and our neighbour. They were lives of recluses, who knew but little of the world, though by no means shut out from all intercourse with it, for the nuns received, besides occasional calls from friends of the hospital, many a visit from sundry Dominican Fathers from various monastic institutions of Florence, when the *guardaroba* was filled with the sound of chatting and merry laughter and little jokes.

Of course the soldier-lads—the "*bambini*"—loved the merry, kindly nuns, who were so content with their high calling of chastity, poverty, and obedience, living like children, without ambition and without anxiety; and we all enjoyed the little bustle and stir on the mornings when one of the nuns would take off her white apron and cover her spotless white habit and scapulary with the voluminous black cloak of her order, her face emerging from the stiff white wimple over her brows, and the sur-

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rounding gorget, shadowed by the stiffly starched cap, supporting the flowing black veil, her only ornament being the handsome silver pectoral crucifix and the gold wedding ring on her right hand. She was a stately figure, ready to issue forth to Florence to make the necessary purchases for the community.

There were Sor Agnese, the Sister Superior, gentle and firm, and her assistant with the nursing, Sor Columba, quiet, dignified, patient, and saddened by the suffering around her, but ever ready to brighten up with quiet bursts of fun; Sor Casimira, the *bambina* of the nuns, and splendid Sor Enrica, a veritable fire-brand when roused to an outburst of spiritual fervour.

Sor Enrica was the eldest of the four Dominican Sisters in charge of the little hospital. She was the head of the *guardaroba*, her duty being to send articles to the weekly laundry, count them on their return, and put them away, and generally arrange their use and keep them repaired, besides attending to the mending of the old uniforms of patients. By nature she was a woman intended to rule, and many a time I

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have seen her ready to take the word out of the mouth of the quiet Mother Superior, and then withdraw into herself, checked by the splendid discipline of her order. Her faith was simple but strong, and her religious zeal was fired by the warm Roman blood which flowed in her veins. Youth had been left far behind, and she had become cumbersome of person, and her limbs were often racked by rheumatism, but a smile was always ready to light up the large square face with the prominent chin and great overhanging brows, under which gazed beautiful, earnest brown eyes, as of a young girl, which at times took a curious, piercing, searching expression.

But one day I saw an astonishing change in the familiar face, which after a silent, inquiring glance at the Mother Superior took on an expression of terrible sternness, and in a moment the great *guardaroba* was filled with a torrent of angry expostulation, an eloquent religious discourse on the future life, and the wrath of God to come on freethinkers and atheists. It so happened that morning that I was alone

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with the two nuns, I mending, and they pulling out and putting away sheets, etc. Two convalescent soldiers, one a handsome young man, minus a leg, waiting till he was strong enough to bear an artificial one, with a young wife and children somewhere, the other a young, frightfully lamed soldier, without any religion except a habit of attending service in church, were seated, as usual, on either side of a table, pulling out shirts between them, instead of ironing them.

We had been listening to the talk of the latter, who was discouraged by a relapse in the condition of his wound, and was saying impious things to his comrade, and assuring him that there would be no future life after this world, and trying, as his habit was, to instil socialistic doctrines. Thereupon Sor Enrica dropped her sheets, and, like a whirlwind, rushed across the red brick floor upon the astonished couple, thundering out anger, contempt, and disgust, her brown eyes seeming to turn to glorious coals of fire, and her face became not that of a gentle nun, issuing from its wimple and cap,

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but the face of some stern Norman warrior in steel helmet of the Bayeux tapestry, as he hacked some foe to death.

The soldiers were silent. The married man looked slightly amused, but very sheepish. The socialist took on an impertinent expression, and he turned to me, as I sat a few yards off at a small round table, heaped with shirts, in a window, expecting me to join in a sympathetic smile of amusement. But he saw that I had dropped my work, and that I was listening with all my ears to the clear, loud Italian, which uttered glorious truths, and that the dear nun's inspired outburst had filled my eyes with tears of enthusiasm.

Then he turned his eyes away abashed, and Sor Enrica, becoming aware of the little silent act, and pausing for breath, crossed the room to me, and exclaimed, " Per Bacche ! Signorina, am I not right ? " The worthy nun would have been horrified had she known that in her old-world colloquial exclamation she had appealed to the heathen god of wine to strengthen the truth of a Christian doctrine ! I could only

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murmur, "Si, veramente," and hold out my hand to her across the table, and she gave it such a grip before she returned to the charge. The "*bambini*" were thankful to escape soon after at the luncheon hour.

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CHAPTER III

IN A HOSPITAL FOR MAIMED SOLDIERS

On the 22nd of November, news came of the death of Italy's arch-foe, the Emperor of Austria, Franz Joseph, and the streets of Florence rang with the glad cry, "Ceppo Beppo e morto!"

On the 2nd of December, a great gladness came to me, so I went to Florence to buy Samaritana uniforms. After two months in Italy, I had picked up enough Italian not only to understand most that I heard spoken, but to make myself understood, and my great longing to do a little for those who had done and suffered so much for me was about to be fulfilled. I, who was too old to do any nursing in an English hospital, had found an opening in an Italian one, where my very lack of youth made my peculiar services of greater value.

Until the Great War, hospital nursing in

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Italy had been largely, if not entirely, in the hands of sisters of various religious orders, whose attendance on the needs of their patients was curiously hampered and limited by the restrictions of their orders.

The average Italian hospital, with its rude and primitive furniture, and neglect of many sanitary precautions, would fill the mind of an English trained nurse with dismay; but what would be her feelings regarding a ward sister, whose religious rule forbade her to see a male patient nude below his neck or above his ankles? The same state of affairs seems to have obtained in France, for an English trained nurse who devoted two months to voluntary work in a French Red Cross hospital, for mixed wounded convalescent French soldiers, in the autumn of 1916, told me that during that period none of the patients had any part of him but his face and hands washed.

When Italy joined the Allies against the Central Powers, and began her War against her old enemy, Austria, the influence and sympathy of the many British and American

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residents were felt and appreciated, and two societies of voluntary nurses were formed who worked with the various orders of nuns in many of the hospitals, though some religious nurses, like the Dominican Sisters at the military hospital in the Convent of San Domenico da Fiesole, and the Carmelite Sisters at the military hospital for infectious cases opposite declined lay assistance, nor was it tolerated in hospitals or wards for wounded officers, on account of the possibility of flirtations between nurses and patients.

The two societies of nurses at Florence were called the "Croce Rossa" and the "Scuole Samaritane," equivalent respectively to the British Red Cross and the V.A.D. At the time that I became a probationer in the latter society, it was but feeling its way as regards many necessary reforms, and the Italian inspectress was well meaning and zealous, but anxious not to irritate the military medical authorities.

There were rarely more than seventy patients in the hospital in which I worked. The Scuole Samaritane were under the control of Professor

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Burci of Santa Maria Nuova, with an Italian inspectress, and a newly appointed English matron, who, in my time, managed to get no authority. There were six Samaritane, four Italian—one in the *medicazione* room, the wife of an officer, and three nurses—and two English, a lady, who was absent owing to strain due to overwork, and myself. But the hospital was really in the charge of four sisters of the order of St. Vincent de Paul, who were good to look upon, with their most practical peasant's costume, and their great stiff, white-winged caps. Our capitano-medico was a clever surgeon, who visited this and the two other Florentine hospitals for the maimed. The tenente-medico slept in the hospital, and the staff further consisted of the quartermaster, who had the rank of captain, and a good many military orderlies, and an excellent chaplain, who also had care of the religion and morals of the patients in the other two hospitals for the maimed. This Dominican "Padre Capelliano" was a tactful and cheerful man of education and high character, and great personal charm.

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At the outbreak of the War, the owners of a large Villa had wisely offered it to the Italian government for usé as a hospital. It was in a pleasant garden on the side of the " Old Road " to Fiesole, and was situated in lovely hill country, one mile from the Cathedral of Fiesole, and three miles from that of Florence.

Two nuns were in charge of the patients, day and night, but their principal duties were to watch over them, sometimes to take temperatures, to prepare their food and bring it to them, look after their religious welfare, and shepherd those who could walk or shuffle to the chapel every evening. My first Sor Superiore was sweet and lovely, and exquisite in her unconscious air of holiness and other-worldliness. One Sunday I found her seated by a bedside, and I stood a few moments watching her, and then glanced down at Luigi Turcketti, a middle-aged man, who had lost one leg near the Isonzo. As our eyes met he said, under his breath, " Her face of peace is like a prayer ! " Alas, a few days later she was removed to a hospital in another town. She

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was, I fear, too beautiful to be allowed to remain anywhere for long. She was succeeded by a very ugly, but amiable old lady. Sor Gabriella, who was a nurse, and ruled over the kitchen, was pleasant, handsome, and practical, and hail-fellow-well-met with the "*bambini.*" Sor Angelica of the *guardaroba* was not generally popular, but was always extremely kind to me, and of course I was flattered, because after my first visit of ceremony to her I overheard her observe to another nun that I was "*carina*"—a little dear! For my benefit she talked to me in appalling French, and one day cross-examined me concerning my religion, and the differences between the Roman and Anglican branches of the Holy Catholic Church. But she spoke in a very tolerant spirit, and, in spite of my careful and conscientious explanations, she said she supposed that I belonged to the "Quakeré"—Quakers.

In my time the working hours for the Samaritane were from 8 a.m. till noon, and from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. The military orderlies did the roughest work of the wards, in a very rough, but good-

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tempered manner, and every morning took a little water round to each bed for the patients to wash their faces and hands, the usual mode of cleansing their bodies and limbs before my time being merely to change their shirts and sheets once a fortnight, or the former, if very necessary, once a week. Now and then, if a patient became insufferably dirty, the capitano-medico ordered the orderlies to wash him on the operating table. There were no hair-brushes in the establishment, and only a few pocket combs were sometimes produced from the patients' "treasure bags," with a little looking-glass; consequently many a head of curly black hair might have to be shaved, well rubbed over with *bensina*, and covered with a white pointed night-cap. The men's faces were always kept nicely shaved.

Early in the morning, the patients had a light breakfast of a cup of coffee and a hunch of bread. Most of them were taken to the operating-room for examinations and fresh dressings. During the absence of each patient, the Samaritane had to make his bed. The

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mornings of the Samaritane were entirely occupied with bed-making, which was really hard work, and in changing dressings. Between 11 a.m. and noon, the patients had a solid meal, consisting of a first course of soup with a thick stodge of small macaroni in it, with slight variations, a large piece of bread, and as second course a liberal helping of meat and cooked green vegetable, or salad. Health permitting, a good many of them drank a tumblerful of wine, and although eggs were scarce and dear a patient needing feeding up had an egg or two beaten up in his macaroni basin. The meat was generally minced and mixed with bread crumbs, shaped into long cakes and fried, and the more delicate patients had a large helping of chicken, either boiled or roast. The afternoon meal, served about 4 or 4.30 p.m., was exactly similar. From 12 to 2 o'clock two nuns had sole charge of the hospital, and most of the patients slept in their beds, while the orderlies enjoyed their well-earned siesta in dozing on their chairs. If a patient were very ill or injured, he was

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wheeled recumbent to the operating room, but if he were merely unable to walk or possessed of only one leg he was carried, often up and down stairs, on the back of an orderly, with his arms clasped round the latter's neck. The orderlies were generally very tall, strong, middle-aged men, and the maimed soldiers were often only middle height, or short and slight in build.

It was the English lady, much needing a rest, who told me of an opening for work in this hospital, and one afternoon she took me to it to introduce me to the English—nominal—matron, the Italian—virtual one—head of the *medicazione* room, to the nuns, and to sixty patients.

I volunteered to do whatever would be most helpful, and as I had only done a little amateur nursing in my own home, and knew nothing about dressings, or even "first aid," I was appointed washer to the hospital, and ward maid, my hours of service being three hours in the afternoon, six days a week, including Sunday. I had instructions, from the capitano-

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medico, on no account to wash any part of a patient till an hour and a half after he had taken food, and, from the inspectress, on no account to attempt to wash a man if he preferred to be dirty, which was the case with a few, though most became touchingly grateful for the relief which I afforded them.

Some time previously a big batch of patients must have arrived together, for many seemed in about the same degree of suffering or convalescence, and during my first week a considerable number were very ill and feverish, and for a day or two I was so saddened and low-spirited that it was difficult to hide from the watchful, curious eyes that I was near crying, but as soon as I got used to the strangeness of the place, and the awful sense of mutilation, I found that my dear hospital was one of the happiest, cheeriest places in the world. It was the temporary home of men who seemed patiently resigned to a maimed existence, without ambition, for the time being, at least, freed from fear or anxiety, feeling that they had done their duty to their country, content to rest awhile from their

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labours, though some were much exercised in their minds because they had not been betrothed before being maimed, fearing no girls would marry and work for them afterwards, and knowing that, in Italy, a betrothal is nearly as binding to a girl as a marriage vow.

My first afternoon of work was not a comfortable one. I had been told to arrive at 4 p.m. and to stay till 7 p.m., but the matron did not keep her word, and was not there to start me in my work, having gone for a walk instead. I had great difficulty in understanding the patients, for, of course, finding I knew very little Italian, they shouted at me as if I were stone-deaf, and many of them spoke various forms of patois. The orderlies were Florentine, and I was unfamiliar with their accent, and frightfully bewildered, not knowing that when a man said, for instance, "huesta hasa," he meant "questa casa"—this house. At first, I was afraid of misunderstanding and hurting a patient through inadvertence. But I found that several of them spoke French, and translated what their neighbours said, and some, like myself—

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hence a bond of union—had been to New York, and spoke "New Yorké." A few lay quietly watching me, and my difficulties, and many a time, when near despair, a gentle voice from across a ward would say, "Signora"—because for a long time, some grey hair escaping from under my cap made them think me a married woman, like most of the Samaritane. Then I would cross over to the bed of the speaker, and he would repeat slowly, in exquisite Italian, what had just been shouted at me in the local accent or in patois of Milan or the Trentino, and I would understand perfectly. But soon two or three men insisted on my speaking Italian, and corrected me word for word, as if they had been teachers.

One day I became so angry with the vulgar familiarity of the only impertinent but most good-natured orderly, that in my wrath I suddenly became fluent, so I owed even him some gratitude. I was initiated into my ward work by him, and by a very kind Italian Samaritana, who also made me talk to her a good deal in our spare moments. She taught

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me how to wind old bandages round cotton-wool in the form of a wreath, to be put under a back to prevent bed-sores, and how to dress a sprained ankle of a man in quarantine in a lonely attic. I had to feed a poor lad who had lost both hands, and after the meal at 4.30, to dry sixty basins, spoons, forks, plates, glasses, etc., after the orderlies had washed them, and to arrange all neatly on the bed-tables. In so doing, I may as well observe that I got my shoes and stockings wet through, owing to having to stand in the water that the orderlies had upset by each bedside on the cemented floor, but after a week or two the matron did manage to improve this state of affairs, though of course the floors were always too filthy to kneel on. In the magnificently furnished American Hospital, a patient wrote home that he was not comfortable there, because there was " troppo lusso "—" too much luxury "—for he was not allowed even to spit on the floor.

The next time I went to the hospital, finding that the directress had again left me in the lurch,

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I took heart of grace, and broke the ice of my more serious undertaking. It was not easy for me, for I had been warned that some of the men would be absolutely innocent of any sense of decency, and some would be very prudish, and I, the "Signorina Inglese," was about to institute a strange custom.

My first victim was a peasant of the Trentino, who could understand what I said, but whose dialect generally had to be translated for my benefit, into "New Yorké," by three neighbours. I was supplied with towels, *bensina*, and soap, and an orderly brought me a small bath of tepid water. He was twenty-four, a tailor by profession, and had lost a leg in the first battle of Gorizia. We became actors in a semicircle of five silent orderlies, and a lot of patients, who had hobbled in on crutches, or hopped without any from other wards. To my secret dismay, Vicenzo sat up in bed, and suddenly stripped off his shirt, and said, "Ora sono nudo"—"Now I am naked." I observed gravely, "You certainly are, and if you do not take care you will catch cold. I had better

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cover you up, and wash you bit by bit." So I made him lie down again, and draped him more or less with towels, and then began at his foot, and worked upwards. The audience soon saw that though my methods were thorough they were decent. After the first week I did not have to persuade the men to be washed, for every afternoon, when I looked in at any ward, I would be greeted with exclamations from several voices at once, "Signora, sono sporco!"—"I'm dirty, mum!"

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CHAPTER IV

MAKING FRIENDS

I WAS asked to spend most of my least busy time in the third, fourth, and fifth wards, because there the patients were most ill. At that period, nearly all were forced to lie on their backs, many of them with cradles over their legs. Several had not been wounded, but crippled by frost-bite.

Soon, I began to make friends, and my arrival was watched for by the patients, because I brought them books and newspapers from my sister-in-law. At first, my offers of literature were met with hesitation, and the shy question, "Si paga?"—"Must it be paid for?"—to which came my indignant answer, "Certainly not."

In the fourth ward, in two beds side by side, lay men whom I had to feed. One was Dolceri, a Milanese, a surly youth, who, for days,

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shouted at me in patois, and clearly regarded me as the most deplorable idiot he had ever come across. He had had the left arm amputated above the elbow, and the right hand shattered, so that it would ever be useless to him, and he was in hideous pain. The other, Pasquale Bovi, a Neapolitan, who could neither read nor write, whose right hand and left arm had been amputated, was always in dull pain, but never complaining, and nearly always smiling and singing. I used to tuck his table-napkin into his collar, but when he got well enough to put on a uniform before proceeding to Naples he objected to be treated with so much ignominy.

One afternoon, while feeding Bovi, Dolceri lay watching me. He was very ill at the time, and sat up with the help of four pillows, with a bed rest behind his back, and another pillow under his arm. He was the only impatient patient in the hospital. He glared into my eyes as if he almost hated me, and muttered hoarsely over and over again, " Per la Patria." I turned upon him with excitement, and said :

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"Yes, for your country, for your King, for your father and your mother, for your home, for me, an Englishwoman, whom Italy is sheltering! You are all of you heroes!"

He looked surprised. I turned to Bovi, and said:

"Why don't you grumble, Pasquale? You have lost both hands!"

He replied, smiling:

"Signora, I always sing."

And so he did, poor fellow, like a cheerful little chaffinch, except one day when he felt too ill.

Dolceri's interpreter for me was another Milanese, Angelo Robbiani, a nice fat boy, who had been picked up on the battlefield by the British Ambulance, ten minutes after he received the injury to his left leg. He had lain for many months with his legs under a cradle, waiting for the inflammation to be sufficiently reduced to allow a piece of shell to be extracted. He lay in a corner of the room, always patient, charming, and courteous.

In another corner lay Giacinto Iscariotti—

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how could one so gentle and good have inherited such a terrible surname as Iscariot? He was twenty-seven years of age, a shoemaker by trade. One of his brothers was fighting in the Trentino, and another was a prisoner in Austria. He was unmarried, but his father and mother were living. Once he asked me to put a post card into the letter box, and said, "Signora, will you see if you can read it?" I took it to the light, and saw that it was addressed to "Mei chiarissimi Genatore," and he smiled so happily as I said, "Yes, indeed, you have written to your dear parents." His left leg had been amputated, and the right knee injured, so he had lain for months under a cradle, with his back covered with bed-sores, and was generally very ill.

One night, while I was tending the fat boy, I was surprised, and my eyes met those of the boy, and there was a hush in the room. Cheery Pasquale Bovi was lying silent beside the poor lad who so grudged his awful sufferings "per la patria," but *he* had at last ceased to groan. Milanese Moti, in another corner, quietly

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turned his head towards the handsome contented lad, Pietro Valeri, who could neither read nor write, and had lost both feet, but later, while waiting for artificial feet and boots, would rush about the wards upright on his knees. Valeri, as I afterwards found, had a trick of singing softly without moving his lips, with his head propped up. But when I turned every head was motionless on the pillows, and my eyes sought those of Moti, in his corner, who pointed with his finger to the far corner of the room, to where Iscariotti lay, with his cheeks slightly flushed, breathing, rather than singing under his breath, a verse of something soft as the whisper of the wind in an Æolian harp.

No one stirred when the silence came, but we expected, we waited, almost in awe. Again the sweet notes fell on our ears; and, at the third verse, the lad next added his voice to that of the gentle shoemaker. Then Bovi and Moti joined in, and the swell of their voices caused silence in the noisy fifth ward, and attention in the more sedate and well-behaved third ward. But in a moment most of the men and

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lads in the three wards were singing verse after verse, or at least joining in the recurring chorus. It was wonderful, and lovely, so soft and musical, and every singer was more or less in pain, and every one had just passed into convalescence, and realized the blessed fact. I understood only a few of the words, but it sounded like a hymn, or rather like some simple church litany. I looked again at the smiling face of the fat boy, and said :

" It is beautiful."

He murmured :

" It is a song of the soldiers on the march."

I never heard it again.

One day Iscariotti asked me if I were paid for what I did in the hospital. I answered :

" Of course not."

" It is well ; it is a work of charity that you do."

However, few of the men say " Thank you " to the Samaritane, though some are charming. Luigi Turchetti was anxious to know whether Italian ladies work in English hospitals.

Latterly, at the desire of the capitano-medico,

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I worked from 2 till 5 p.m., but at first my hours were from 4 till 7 p.m. I then had time to distribute books and papers, and to greet all the patients, who were eagerly looking forward to the second great event, which broke the monotony of the day—dinner! I told them that their restlessness before meals reminded me of the behaviour of the lions and tigers in the Zoological Gardens. In wards where the men were convalescent, the noise was fearful, for each one who possessed hands held his crockery soup basin in his left hand, and battered it with a spoon held in the right, so that the nuns in the great kitchen in the basement must have heard a continuous sound as of a mighty gong. About a quarter of an hour before the meal was served, an orderly and a nun brought round big hunches of long, hard-crusted war bread, and a large cask of red wine, from which each man had a glassful. Also a good deal of milk was allowed to patients specially needing it.

When all was ready, the doors of the three wards were thrown open, and Sor Gabriella,

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often accompanied by a lay sister, and an orderly with a great bucket of soup and macaroni, stood at the first door, and said a long, rhyming grace in a loud, nasal voice, which had the effect of producing silence. Then every basin was filled, and I took to the bucket those of my two helpless charges, into which I had already beaten up a couple of eggs, as they were invalids. Then came a bad time for me, and woe betide me if I gave Dolceri his either too hot or too cold. He was pitied and petted by every one, and he alone made me smuggle Parmesan cheese, which he kept in paper under his mattress, into his soup, and bring him chocolate to put into his early morning cup of coffee, because he said he was considered too delicate to be allowed to eat bread. On my first two days, his wrath and contempt were unbounded, because I had beaten up the whites of his eggs with the yolks. I apologized for my stupidity, and said I would know more Italian in a few days, but the dear fat boy in the corner comforted me by saying clearly :

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"No, signora, you are not stupid, but Dolceri is speaking dialect."

Then came my worst ordeal with the meat course. Dolceri rarely condescended to eat vegetables, and instead of the usual mince cakes he had a very large helping of boiled or roast chicken. I had only a fork with which to get the meat off the bones, no knives being allowed in case the patients might be tempted to use them as weapons. Of course I had to hold the bones in my fingers, and Dolceri was very angry if I did not manage to pitch a very large forkful of meat into his mouth each time. Finally, he always made me hold all the bones to his mouth, for him to bite all the leg and wing joints, and he crunched up most of the bones with his strong white teeth, and swallowed them, as if he had been some savage animal. I was anxious lest he might bite my fingers, and my anxiety amused him.

After he had bullied me thus for a fortnight, he actually said, "Thank you," whereupon all his neighbours burst out laughing, and he looked quite nonplussed. Later, poor Dolceri

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got erysipelas, and was removed for isolation to another hospital. When he came back, I had learnt much more Italian and, in a surly fashion, he grew fond of me, and would not let any other nurse or orderly feed him if I were on the premises, and if he had no special aches or pains he invented them, just to make me sit by his bed, then in an otherwise empty ward, and wind cotton-wool pads and cushions for him, and remake any that had been made by any other Samaritane. One day I asked him why he was so cross, and he growled :

" What do you expect, when I have to eat like a dog ! "

As soon as the meal was over, the orderlies went round with buckets, and washed the plates, basins, etc., and I dried them during the hour and a half allowed for digestion, and then began to wash the patients. When my hours were wisely changed, I washed them first, and left directly after dinner, much to the regret of the orderlies. Now, I hear, most of the orderlies have been called up on active service, so the Samaritane have to work longer hours.

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One evening, I was acting thus as ward maid, in a huge ward on an upper floor. All the beds were occupied, and men who could walk or hobble from other wards were sitting about on the beds, while the Sor Superiore and Sor Angelica had chairs near the door, and at the end of the room was a great sheet stretched before a lantern with oxyhydrogen light. The padre capelliano was about to work the slides of the lantern, and Padre Fecebene was going to give the lads a scripture lesson. The chaplain kindly told me that I might move about the ward gently, and finish my work after the lecture had begun. So I saw the first picture thrown upon the sheet, and to my pleased surprise it was one familiar to me from my early childhood, being no other than the wood-cut of Cain and Abel kneeling at their altars of sacrifice, from Schnorr's Bible Pictures. Then followed, in beautiful Italian, an excellent lesson, such as might be given to a class of older boys in any English Sunday School. All the poor maimed peasant lads, many of whom were absolutely illiterate, listened in rapt

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attention. Then came other delightful pictures, but much to my regret my duties took me to the other wards. The two padres lectured and showed pictures two evenings a week at the three hospitals to which they were attached.

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CHAPTER V

SOME OF THE PATIENTS

NEARLY all of the patients in the hospital were peasants, though some had never worked on the land, but had been in trade, with the exception of a certain Signor Richetti, a pleasant, well-educated man, whose home, unlike that of all the others, was in Florence, so that his handsome wife and two little daughters could visit him every Sunday. He spoke French fluently, and was always very kind and helpful to me. He was a violinist, and his left hand, though not amputated, had been so shattered that never again would he be able to play on his beloved violin, for his string finger was rendered useless.

Many of the men could not read or write, and most of those who could were so illiterate that when I took them a newspaper or a book

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they read it aloud in an undertone, otherwise the sense did not appear to reach their brains.

Giacinto Iscariotti had a clear idea of the military and political feeling of Italy, and would sometimes quietly explain things to his neighbours, and looked eagerly for all news of the warlike situation of his country.

With two or three exceptions, none of them cared to talk of their past experiences at the front. About all I could learn of most were bare outlines, such as these of Giovanni Piazzesi, a Sicilian. After a year in the trenches, on a snow-covered mountain, where, like his comrades, he was often frost-bitten, he was wounded on the 20th November, 1916, at midday, in the trench, by a grenade, which burst and struck eight men, killing two of them. When darkness fell, he was carried to the nearest ambulance, and had his right arm amputated. Both legs were much injured, but he recovered. He spent a month in a hospital in Padua before coming on to Florence.

One exception was Cesare Magnani, a great talker of warlike experiences, a perfectly ir-

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repressible youth, who daily " fought his battles o'er again," except when absorbed in playing lotto. His excitement was intense, and his flow of language and gesticulations and practical demonstrations of past incidents in his campaign extraordinary, so that he became the life of his ward, till he grew strong enough to go to an upper ward, when his former bed was occupied by Giovanni Fabri, who had been frost-bitten on Monte S. Michele, near Monte Boscherio. He was a delightful, unselfish boy, with quiet, tender watchfulness to do little kindnesses like a woman ; gentle and observant ; handsome, but with curious, narrow eyes, and half of one foot amputated after frost-bite.

Giovanni Pieraccini was a nice fellow, who had had one leg amputated, yet, when he saw his large ward, empty of comrades, who had gone down to enjoy an hour or two of sunshine in the garden, and " to watch the passing " from their terrace above the " old road " to Fiesole, in sight of the anti-aircraft guns crowning Monte Ceceri, and the lovely mountainous view towards Vallombrosa, he would

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slip out of bed, and quietly and unobtrusively put all the other beds tidy and comfortable. He said that, except poor Dolceri, no man in the hospital regretted what he had lost for his country.

Burchelli was a good-looking, cheerful, and kindly young man, who had lost a leg on the Isonzo. He used to hop about from ward to ward, without crutches, though he was glad enough of my shoulder as a support, if I were near at hand. One day, however, he fell, and became very ill and feverish, the fall being followed by erysipelas, and so he was removed for isolation to the convent hospital of San Domenico, where I saw him at lunch when he became convalescent.

Giovanni Galeotti belonged to an ordinary and pleasant type. He was a native of Mantua, and was aged twenty-one, having been in the army since he was nineteen. He had been on active service for three months, and then one of his legs had to be amputated. He was always smiling and patient, and full of kindness to others, especially to a most unfortunate blind

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neighbour. One Sunday he had the joy of a visit from his father.

There were several pale-faced Bedouins, with straight brown hair, and a fair number of good-natured Sicilians, whose conversations with me had to be interpreted by such of them as spoke "New Yorké." One who had returned uncalled to his country, at the beginning of the War, had lost an arm for her. He spoke some English as he had been a shoe-shiner, and ice-cream maker in Quebec, Montreal and elsewhere. He roused the admiration of his comrades by singing to me:

> "It's a long, long way to Tiperarée,
> And de girl dat I loave."

Those most to be pitied and petted were always spoken of by their Christian names. One such was "Carlo"—a Neapolitan of negro extraction. He was blind in one eye. Both arms had been amputated, and he was always in pain; but he was always merry and *vulgar*, yet quite a nice fellow. Milanese Moti, a painter of ceilings in the Italian style of decoration, from Paris, had been injured, by the explosion

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of a grenade, in the left arm, and so badly in a leg that, although he was picked up ten minutes later, it could not be saved, but had to be amputated a month later at Padua. He was always on his back, with the other leg under a cradle, and was absolutely patient. He spoke French well, and was extremely intelligent, but quiet and reserved with his neighbours, and not popular with them.

There was an extremely handsome Sicilian, from Messina, of the name of Davi, with regular features, and such rosy cheeks, magnificent dark eyes, thick eyebrows and moustache and curling black hair, that the capitano-medico nicknamed him "Il bello." One leg had been amputated, but he was well and contented. He had an incurable aversion to water, so in spite of the doctor's repeated orders for a bath he absolutely refused, in the "New Yorké" language, to let me wash anything but his head, and that only after the curls had been suddenly shaved off, for a very obvious reason. Nevertheless, he was evidently grateful for the many little services I could do for him. One Sunday

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afternoon, on arriving, I half opened the door of his ward to greet the occupants in general, having pressing duties in the one adjoining. Then the man in the bed next to Davi said in "New Yorké" accent:

"Signora, will you come 'ere. De moder and fader of Davi are come to see 'im, and dis feller want to present dem to you."

I approached the bed, and found a wrinkled little old peasant woman—probably not fifty years old!—seated in a chair on the right side of the pillow, and her old bearded husband in a chair beside her, while on the other side of the bed stood the handsome elder brother of Davi. Davi turned to his mother and said:

"La signorina inglese." Then, looking at me, he said, "My moder and fader are come to see me for half de day; dey go back to Messina to-night."

The little old woman stood up and bowed, and I held out my hand to her across the knees of her still seated husband, and she put her right hand into mine. Then a sudden impulse seized her, and in a moment she had thrown

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both arms round my neck, and was clutching me in a trembling embrace, kissing me on the cheeks, as if she were my mother. Very gently I put her back on her chair, and as I leaned over to do so, the old man half rose and kissed me quietly on the forehead. Then Davi turned to his brother and said to me :

" Il mio fratello."

He bowed, with a pleasant smile, and held out his right hand across the bed for me to shake.

During this homely little scene, all the other patients in the ward watched us with silent sympathy, and from every bed, as I passed out of the ward, I was greeted with the same quiet smile, and the same steady, sober gaze of the eyes straight into mine, as though each man wished me to feel that the little old Sicilian mother had expressed some thought from them all towards me.

Corporale Vicenzo Vinicoli, a tailor from the Trentino, had received a wound on the Isonzo, necessitating the amputation of a leg. When he was convalescent, he would rush about the

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wards, with the help of the remaining leg, while sitting in a wicker arm-chair. The artificial legs with the boots as supplied to the Florentine hospitals are very heavy, so that the men prefer to use crutches, keeping the legs only for functions, such as funerals, wedding receptions, and family reunions.

There was a calm, philosophical Neapolitan, speaking "New Yorké," who had lain in bed for more than a year. He told me that in June he had a visit from his wife and child, adding simply, with a contemplative smile:

"They cried when they saw me, because I have lost both feet."

A man who had been in Canada had had both feet frost-bitten, after seven months in the trenches, on the Italian mountain frontier. Amputation of one foot had been necessary, because the boot of that one had been more full of holes than that of the other. He said he screamed day and night for three months after the operation, and many patients told me that frost-bite was far more painful than wounds.

One of the most interesting and intelligent of

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the patients was Alessandro Fisio, who spoke French fluently, having worked for six years on a railway in France, and having a dearly loved French Protestant wife, and a child six months old at Dijon. His right leg had been amputated. He was a handsome man, with light brown curly hair, and was an extremely nice man. He was a Roman Catholic, but would not receive the sacrament on Christmas Day, because, he said, it was not God Who had begun the War, but the Kaiser, tempted by the devil, and he would not receive it till the Allies were triumphant.

Perhaps the most amusing little scamp whom I have ever come across was a vivacious, puny cosmopolitan, with Turkish features, the patronymic Dom, and a wife at Naples. He spoke Arabic, Italian, and French fluently, generally conversing with me in the last language, but frequently mixing Arabic and Italian to puzzle me, this also being a trick of several of the Bedouins. He was the tormentor and entertainer of the upper wards. He informed me that in religion he was Catholic, Jew, or Moham-

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medan, according to his company. He had an aquiline nose, intensely black eyes, thick black hair and eyebrows, a thin face, high cheek-bones, and an enormously long moustache, the ends of which he would twist fiercely, and draw the corkscrew points up to his eye. Then, assuming a fierce and brutal expression, he would inform me that he was the Kaiser. He kept the patients in shouts of laughter with his jokes and antics, but he was also a terror to them, for he teased like a monkey, and had about as much depth of soul as one. If I were washing the head of a man seated at a table, just as I might be in the act of pouring water over the bent head, and letting it run down the man's face into a basin under his chin, Dom would come behind him, press his face into the water to make him splutter and choke, and pour little pebbles, used as lotto counters, down the defenceless man's back, between his shirt and his skin.

Dom's right arm had been amputated as high as possible, and he came to our hospital in order to have a piece of bone—which protruded,

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as the flesh had shrunk in healing, and prevented an artificial arm being worn—cut off. Four days after the little operation, his chest and stump covered with sticking plaster, he was singing in bed, although he frequently grimaced with the pain he was thereby occasioning himself. One day, when I went into the ward to bind pads of cotton-wool on the ends of crutches to keep them from slipping on the cemented floors, Dom, who happened to be in bed, suddenly slipped off his shirt, to explain to me that the cold was giving him great pain in his stump, and he entreated me to knit him a *seccotino*, a stump cover, with which I rejoiced him next day.

A week later, a bed-ridden neighbour played gentle accompaniments on a guitar, to which Dom sang and danced, gesticulating with his left hand, and dancing up to any of the groups of smiling convalescents, and bowing and kissing his hand to his audience. Suddenly he would approach a man on crutches, whose trouser leg hung loose from a stump at the knee, seize it, and make the owner dance

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with him, but in spite of his mad pranks, taking care that his tottering victim did not fall. He could sing bass or falsetto, and played endless monkey tricks on his companions, such as slyly shooting small pebbles brought in from the garden for gambling purposes across the room at Tazzo, an Italian Bedouin of Tripoli and New York, the only patient who, in spite of the tenente-medico's objection, dared to have his rosary hanging at the head of his bed, though many men kept their rosaries in their treasure bags.

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CHAPTER VI

CHRISTMAS-TIDE

As Christmas drew nearer, there was a certain excitement and sense of expectation among the patients. Perhaps they already knew, as I did, that the British and American residents had subscribed to a collection to provide a Yule log for the three hospitals for the maimed.

On Sunday, Christmas Eve, on my way back from Communion at Holy Trinity—one of the two English churches in Florence—I went to a pastry-cook's, and provided myself with sweets to distribute among the inmates of the four wards to which I was chiefly attached.

I worked at the hospital from four till seven o'clock, and during the last hour I observed the chaplain going from bed to bed hearing confessions preparatory to the patient's Communion on Christmas morning. It was curious

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to watch the men's faces, as the cheery, handsome Dominican opened the door of a ward. They who needed him turned their heads silently towards him, and in a moment he would be standing at the pillow, bending his ear to hear the otherwise inaudible whisper. But those who did not want him—and they were many—turned their faces sharply away, and looked at a blank wall.

Christmas morning dawned calm and mild. I walked down to Florence to Holy Communion, and then walked back to breakfast. My brother and sister-in-law had started for the later service at the other English church, and, as usual, I was living too far away to go to Florence again in the morning, so being alone I retired to my own room, to paint from my window, the old *casa colonica*, a little bit of the *podere*, and the distant blue hills beyond the Arno, just a tiny slice out of the glorious panorama to be seen from my brother's house, and from the neighbouring hospital.

When we assembled in the dining-room, at one o'clock, a pleasant surprise awaited us, for

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in the absence of the family the Italian servants had decorated the room for Christmas, with real taste and much cleverness. A gardener had provided them with a variety of beautiful evergreens, some of which were in flower, and they had arranged them very skilfully, though of course they could not refrain from hanging glittering balls among them, but the most curious thing about them was the effect of artificial snow that Adelina had produced by means of white cotton-wool, which lodged quite cunningly on leaves and branches. We felt disappointed next day, when all had been thrown on the rubbish heap in the kitchen-garden.

At four o'clock I went to the hospital, and distributed my chocolates to the patients, and talked to them, and to some English acquaintances, for the capitano-medico and the Yule log, which would want replenishing, had not yet arrived from the other two hospitals.

We waited so long that at last it was decided the patients should begin dinner at once, and get it over quickly. The orderlies and I rushed

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round afterwards, and for the only time but one—and that was when the director was expected on a visit of inspection, though he failed to come—that I was in the hospital the wards were made absolutely clean and tidy, even the patients doing their best to help us. But before dinner the matron asked me not to trouble about my two usual handless charges, but to devote myself to a new-comer in the end ward.

I went at once to make his acquaintance, and, indeed, a pitiable and woeful sight met my eyes. The loquacious Cesare Magnani had been sent upstairs, and his bed was now occupied by Giuseppe Gherza. For the sake of quiet to his cruelly shell-shocked and shattered nerves, and on account of an operation to be performed in his chest, he had been brought two days before from a much larger hospital.

The poor lad could never have been good-looking, and now he was hideously ugly. Nearly all his double teeth had been knocked out. Besides nine scars on his face, it was swollen by a frightful wound near the mouth. His hair

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was cut about with scars, all over the back of his head. The left hand, and the four fingers of the right hand had been amputated, and he was blind in both eyes.

I was not surprised to hear that on the night of his arrival at our hospital he had tried to commit suicide, by dragging the bandage off his left arm, with his thumb, in the hope of bleeding to death, and that now he lay moaning with utter misery and despair. The Samaritane and the orderlies gathered round his bed, with awestricken commiseration, and the patients watched him from their beds with silent pity, and, I feel sure, with inarticulate thanksgiving that, maimed as they all were, they were not completely wrecked, like poor Beppe.

I waited till the others had gradually left that ward. Then I rather shyly, in my broken Italian, told him that I was the English nurse, and that in a few minutes dinner would be coming, and that I wanted him to let me feed him. As I talked to him, I gently stroked his poor forehead. He spoke in a whisper only, but fortunately for me in very clear Italian.

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Between his groans and tearless sobs, he kept on repeating, " Mio bravo tenente, mio bravo tenente." Soon I found he meant to say that the young doctor from the large hospital, who had evidently endeared himself to the poor patient, had been to see him.

I slipped my left arm under his shoulders, and he gradually sat up, leaning against me, and then I learnt the value of the long nurse's cap, for the poor fellow's head was on my shoulder, and in answer to my questions he was telling me that his father was dead, but that his mother was living, and then a happy smile came into the ruined face, as he spoke of his two little brothers, Domenico and Francesco. I think he was a little lightheaded, for he turned his face towards me, and kissed me on the cheek, whispering the words, " Mia madre."

While I was in the act of giving Giuseppe his macaroni, a pretty Croce Rossa nurse from the large hospital asked me in fair English if I would let her feed him. She was, in fact, the lovely daughter of the noble owner of the great Villa which had been turned into a hospital,

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and the Count himself had accompanied his daughter to see her protégé. She asked me to give Giuseppe some grapes, which she had brought for him, but I asked her to let me present to her the dear, unselfish, frost-bitten lad, Giovanni Fabri, in the next bed, for I knew that he would take great care of his neighbour, and do all she wished for him.

As time went on, I found Giuseppe not in the least interesting, but in a couple of days he had grown placid and contented, with an enormous appetite, and pleased to be an object of solicitude to every one. Once a week, a pretty Italian girl with an English mother came to try to make him feel with his one thumb in the hope, later on, of being able to teach him to read Braille. This young girl was a voluntary nurse in a hospital for blind soldiers.

Unlike the English, the Italians have not imported the Christmas-tree from Germany, but the centre of their merrymakings is the Yule log, the *seppi*, which is a survival from heathen times. For the Christmas fête at the three hospitals, a huge Yule log had been hired.

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It was the lower part of the trunk of a large tree, which had been artificially hollowed out, and a layer about an inch and a half thick had been sawn off and fitted back, so as to form a lid to the hollow trunk, thus turning it into a kind of box to contain the presents. The trunk was painted and smartened up outside. It was on a slant from its roots, so the lid was allowed to slide off, because it was overflowing.

In company with an iron fire-dog, it was placed on a stand, and wheeled round the wards by the Samaritane. The Samaritana at the head of the *medicazione* followed it, holding a great, flat, tray-like basket slung round her neck by a ribbon containing a small bunch of flowers for each man. It became my duty to find and fill with water more than seventy small vases and then to put one of these on a table at each pillow.

Several officers, besides the capitano-medico, who distributed the presents, and two or three tenente-medicos, and the quartermaster, who happened also to be a captain, with a delight-

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fully refined and sympathetic face, walked behind the Samaritane, all stopping at each bedside, and many of them saying kindly and encouraging words to the patients. Each man received a bag containing sweets, biscuits, and a couple of small oranges, and a handkerchief tied at both ends with ribbon, striped red, white, and green, the colours of the Italian flag, containing a variety of small, and more or less useful presents, such as little looking-glasses, pocket-combs, penholders, pencils, writing-cases, writing-paper, etc., and from Sor Gabriella, a large orange, and three sweet *paste*—fancy cakes, or rich pastry.

Later, there was a good concert in the great hall, where there was always a grand piano. There were two pianists, two vocalists, and a lady violinist. A few Italian visitors and a good many officers were present. The procession of the patients down the great stone staircase was a queer and pathetic sight. All who could walk or hobble on crutches, or be dressed and be carried down on the backs of orderlies, went.

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I was the only Samaritana who did not join the semicircle in the hall, though many a kindly beckoning hand was raised to entice me down by the friendly Italian ladies, when I occasionally peeped at them from the upper stairs, but I was on duty that afternoon, and did not like to amuse myself while any of the patients were bound to their beds. But I saw poor Giuseppe Gherza had been dressed, and comforted, and was sitting between the handsome, kindhearted count and the lovely Croce Rossa nurse, with a face as tenderly sweet and pure as that of Raphael's "Madonna del Gran'duca" and curiously reminiscent of her. Then I returned to my friends in the wards, and encouraged the men to talk to me about their homes, and their wives and children, till, little by little the treasure bags were opened for me, and out came miscellaneous things, such as rosaries, bunches of charms, letters, photographs of parents, absent wives, and not a few babies, whom the fathers had not yet seen.

At last, when night came, I realized that from morning till evening, every one had been dear

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and lovely to me, and that I had lived through a strange and beautiful Christmas Day.

On New Year's Day, after a service at Holy Trinity, I bought a bunch of mimosa and white "paper narcissi," in a flower-shop in Florence, and took them before lunch to the hospital, for Sor Angelica to put on the altar of the little chapel. On failing to find her in the *guardaroba*, I told an orderly, whom I met in the hall, how and why I wanted to present them to the sisters, so he took me down the basement stairs to a door near the great kitchen. He knocked, and shouted out, "Sorella, per la capella!"—"Sister, for the chapel." Immediately the door was opened, and the four nuns, in their picturesque caps, appeared, and Sor Angelica received the flowers with delight. In the afternoon, when I had got into my uniform, and was working in the wards, at four intervals, each nun came upstairs to thank me separately and very prettily for my gift to the chapel, just as though it had been a gift to herself.

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CHAPTER VII

AN INTERVIEW WITH DÉSIRÉ JEANTET

On the 24th of January I went to the hospital and found many things that I needed locked up, so after fulfilling sundry minor duties I had an hour and a quarter to spare before the patients' dinner-time. Most of the patients of the upper wards were in the garden, but I found Désiré Jeantet bedridden once more, because in hopping about without his crutches he had had a fall. He was feeling lonely, and, being unusually intelligent, I led him on to talking of his personal experiences since the outbreak of the war between Italy and Austria.

Desiderio Jeantet, of Italian parentage, was born in the Val d'Aosta, on the French frontier, and spoke French as his native language, but was sent to school, where he learnt Italian and to read and write. By the time he was twelve

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years old both of his parents were dead, and he went to Besançon, where he earned his livelihood as a sawyer. He became thoroughly French in thought and feeling, being more at ease in the French language, all his friends and correspondents being French. Yet, at the outbreak of the War, he returned to Italy of his own accord, and went to Turin, where he had to wait more than twenty days for his papers.

He observed that, one day, when he gets an artificial foot, he means to return to Besançon, but he feels that he has done his duty to his country, since he has left his foot in Italy.

That day he seemed depressed, for although he expected to be able to get back to some of his old sawyer's work he doubted whether he would be able to bear the pressure of standing on his stump for long. Unlike many Italians, he said:

"If I felt I could not *work*, I should kill myself."

He observed that the pension would not suffice to keep even an unmarried man, unless he could live in the house of his parents.

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Finding that I had still an hour to spare before feeding Giuseppe Gherza for the last time, I proposed that he should tell me how he came to lose his right foot. Unlike most men, he responded very readily. He told his story fluently in fair French, never introducing a word of Italian, speaking clearly, intelligently, never confusing facts, critically, dispassionately, and fairly, without anger, but as he described the first assault his lips smiled, his eyes shone, and his cheeks became heightened in colour, as his eyes gazed straight into mine.

He had slipped on some extra clothing, and we were seated opposite each other, each on the side of an empty bed. Meanwhile some of the men, who had wandered back from the garden and were assembled round the stove, watched us as we were speaking, without understanding a word, and others shouted and laughed over lotto. As he spoke, he made my eyes brighten with sympathy and eager interest.

"The accident happened at 3 o'clock early in November, 1916, high up on the Carso," he

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said. " I and four other men were lying behind a rampart of rocks, with a sense of perfect security, for no battle was raging at the time. But the Italians were firing now and again, and a certain ball fell within our own lines, hit a mass of rock, rebounded, and rested on the rug under which I was lying. The four other men saw it coming, and cried out as they sprang out of its path, but I had been asleep, and when roused lay and looked at it for a few minutes. Then all at once I tried to move my leg, but could not, for the ball was not only lying on my foot, but had cut off all my toes and half of my foot. Next day my foot was amputated above the ankle."

" Did you feel much pain in your foot at the time of the accident ? " I asked.

" Practically none," he answered. " Nor when I was moved, except when the foot was touched. I never cried out. And when my companions in the hospital asked why I never complained nor groaned, I said, ' Why should I ? ' for I was now safe. My life has been spared, and I might have lost my eyes, or

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had my face made hideous, or have lost both feet or hands, or I might have had my leg amputated high up in the thigh. Well, the first few days I was in hospital it was impossible to sleep day or night owing to the cries and groans of the wounded soldiers. There was very little pain, as a rule, in a limb that was going to be amputated, but the men cried with despair at the thought of their loss."

Evidently resignation comes later with merriment and patience.

Désiré Jeantet had been at the Front in the first line only about ten days, just at the beginning of the Italian successes. He had had a few days of hard fighting. Taking advantage, as usual, of bad weather, the Austrians had begun a heavy bombardment, followed by a counter-bombardment by the Italians, so that the first lines of both opposing forces were heaped with dead. When the firing ceased, the Italians began the assault, climbing out of their shelter over the dead bodies of their comrades.

"Before making the assault, were all the

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Italians given wine to drink to keep up their courage ? " I asked.

" No," said Désiré, laughing. " We had not drunk a drop of wine for three days. The Italian methods of attack are just like those of the Boches."

" What do you mean ? " I asked.

" Oh," he said, " the men are driven out of the trenches or lines by the officers, who stand behind them with loaded pistols, themselves in places of comparative safety. If an officer sees a man hesitate, he calls out, ' Will you be killed by the enemy or by me ? ' I saw two men stop with their heads together, and the lieutenant gave them their choice, so they rushed on the Austrians for a *chance*. I saw another man, a father of six children, frightened and slightly wounded. He paused, and did not move at the shout, so the lieutenant shot him dead."

" And you," I asked, " what did you feel like ? "

" Oh, I trembled and shook, but I went on, as I knew I could not go back."

" Ah ! " I exclaimed. " All the same, I see

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you are a brave soldier, or you would not smile, and your eyes would not beam as they do, if you had not felt the excitement of battle ! "

" Oh, what I saw around me was horrible and sad," he admitted, but, nevertheless, it was fine. When we got to the first Austrian line it was terrible, but when we got to the third line we had ceased to tremble."

"How was that ? " I asked.

" Well," he chuckled, " because the men and officers, too, were surrendering all along the line."

" Now," I said, after a pause, " tell me about the officers. Are they nice to the men ? "

He smiled a contemptuous smile, and said :

" They nearly always get out of danger, and drive, not lead, their men to an assault, and only get to the Front when they see a great danger has been overcome, and they want to put their men's success to their credit.

" We had one lieutenant who was charming. All along the march he would go from one man to another and say, ' Giovanni, is your pack a bit heavy ? ' ' Pietro, have you forgotten all

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of your songs ? ' ' Cheer up, Luigi, the longest road has an ending ! ' ' Beppo, what was that joke you were making the boys laugh about last night ? ' ' Courage, boys ! ' And on we went, for we all loved our lieutenant.

" But there are many officers who treat their men as if they were dirt beneath their feet, until they get to the first line trenches, and then all the officers are nice to their men, for they remember that, when the order for the attack comes, they have to get their men out first, and always try to keep them in a good temper, and to shelter behind them. But one day I saw a captain and a first and second lieutenant resting in one hole, and all at once all three were killed by the same grenade."

I believe that Désiré Jeantet was unfortunate in the officers with whom he was brought in contact, for I know that some officers led, not drove, their men, and were gladly and enthusiastically followed by them to the attack.

" Are you a Catholic ? " I asked.

" Yes," he said, " I am a Catholic."

" Then tell me, please," I said, " about the

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priests at the Front. Did you have a chaplain in a cassock ? "

" No," he answered, " we did not have a chaplain, and I never saw one in the actual fighting. But there were three padres in uniform in our battalion, each of whom had a little field altar, which he arranged against some rocks, where he could say his Mass. One day I saw one of the padres put his surplice over his uniform and bless the grave of some soldiers whom we were burying, but what I don't understand is why a padre does not bless the whole field of battle, because one day a great pit was dug and a great number of dead soldiers were buried in it, and none of the padres blessed it.

" There is another point I don't understand," he said. " It seems quite natural to me for the French priests to be made to turn soldiers and fight, because the Church in France is disestablished from the State ; but the Church in Italy is not disestablished, and I have seen lots of young priests who are not soldiers, and yet many others are sent to the Front. I don't see

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why any of the priests should be made to fight, for by their whole life they are unprepared for war, and they do not make good soldiers."

"Well," I said, "and how about the food? Did you get plenty at the Front?"

He shrugged his shoulders. He admitted that the administration sent sufficient, but the food was horrible in condition and shamefully diminished in quantity by the time it reached the privates. Every non-commissioned officer filled his gourd with the wine intended for the men, most of whom, after the sergeant and corporal had taken a few sips, only got half a glass. The rations were served only in the evening, and consisted of wine, coffee, soup, black bread, and at first white bread, meat, and cheese. The meat was disgusting and revolting, covered with the hairs of the sack, and he never ate it. The cheese was very nasty, and he put it into his soup; but the white bread was excellent, and Désiré always rushed to the sacks, and took as much as he could of it, the moment it arrived, before the other men had taken all.

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Some of the men ate the horrible meat, for some of them came from very rough homes, but Jeantet observed that considering that he was only a simple *contadino* he had been pretty well educated—this was a very evident fact. After leaving France, he had been dismayed by the black bread at Turin. It was so shamefully kneaded that outside was a horribly hard crust, and inside a lot of unmixed, dry flour.

Towards the end of our interview, Désiré Jeantet told me that Austrian bullets are larger than Italian bullets, and are made of lead covered with iron, and they break bones; but Italian bullets are all one, and smash into the flesh, but either of them rarely kills a man.

On the 8th of February I went to the hospital for the last time, to say good-bye to the sisters and patients. Many of those in whom I had been most interested had already left, so I had less to regret leaving behind me. But I was rather touched at the last, because all who could walk or hobble gathered round me, and one of them said in Italian:

"Signorina, when you see the English soldiers,

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will you greet them from us, their comrades in arms ? "

Long since I have sent that message on to some of our heroes in Mesopotamia, and an acknowledgment from the man who received it reached an English mother after two months of vicissitudes in a mail-bag.

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CHAPTER VIII

HOMEWARD BOUND

In spite of the intense interest of life in and near the lovely little city on the Arno, with its fascinating links with a romantic historic past, and with its wondrous atmosphere of long-sustained religious zeal and glorious art, I am so intensely English that I was growing home-sick for England, and longing for a chance of returning.

I had heard of the difficulties ahead of me on the journey, and the probability of being held up for days, partly because of snow on the mountains, but chiefly because of the presence of submarines in the Channel.

My great desire was to reach England before Lent, and, though all hopes of finding acquaintances with whom to travel were blighted, I finally overcame the opposition of kind friends

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in England and Italy, and all preliminary preparations were got over, and I was ready to start. My brother had kindly gone himself to Livorno, to get the *visé* to my passport from the British Consul-General, ensuring that during the whole of my return journey through Italy and France I should be *expected* on the railway. I had been to the Questura in Florence and satisfied the local authorities that I was not a suspected German spy of the same name from Berne, since more than a quarter of a century had passed since I had entered the city.

My numerous copies of English photographs for my passport had been deposited at so many places on my outward journey that the stock was nearly exhausted, so I had been to a Florentine photographer and had a new negative taken, and had supplied myself with plenty of copies for the homeward journey. But the winter was unusually severe all over Europe, and the local papers were full of pictures of the infrequent sight of Florence under snow, such as had not been seen there for thirty-five years. Of course no Italian horse and carriage could

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get up either of the steep roads to Fiesole, to drive me and my luggage to the station, so for a whole week my departure was delayed, and my passport permit to travel was nearly expired. If my return had been put off a fortnight longer, I should have been an exile in Florence till the end of the War.

My suspense ended on the 8th February with a partial thaw. Next day my brother took me to Cook's office for my tickets, and, with the help of the agent, he kindly wrote out notes for my conduct in all possible emergencies. Moreover, I learnt with gratitude that man is a social animal, and that even an independent woman had best depend on the experience and welcome help of the "fellow feeling that makes us wondrous kind." It so happened that a fortnight earlier the daughter of the English chaplain of the Church of the Holy Trinity, Florence, had been recalled to England; and, although we were but slightly acquainted, she wrote me a long letter of guidance as to what to expect and avoid, and with what, and against what, to arm myself.

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Consequently, there was no hitch anywhere, and I thoroughly enjoyed the delicious landscape setting, the unexpectedness of everything, the delightful kindness of all Italian, French, and British whom I encountered, the glorious beauty of the snow through Italy, over the wild grandeur of the Mont Cenis Pass, and through France.

On Saturday, the 10th February, my brother drove with me to the railway station at Florence, and settled me comfortably in a first-class carriage. As it was still early, the only other occupant of the carriage was an important-looking Italian in a handsome fur-lined coat, who looked like a professor. The carriages were well warmed, as were all on the journey.

Partings are always hard, and we had said all the last words, and my brother was afraid I might lose my corner seat, so he made me get into the carriage, while he kept a melancholy watch outside, and I managed to smile at him through the window, but contrived to dodge now and then behind the window frame lest he should see me in an un-Spartan state of mind.

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Meanwhile, like the train, the carriage was getting crowded. Opposite me sat a very handsome tall Italian gentleman of about forty, who seemed to be studying me and the details of my appearance. The other passengers were soldiers, priests, peasants, and women of the lower middle class, who came and went, for it was an omnibus-train as far as Pisa. The professor and the gentleman soon entered into conversation, to which I gave no heed, and every one greeted the professor, who seemed well known, and who evidently took a lively and kindly interest in everything.

After a while the priests and peasants got out, and three soldiers got in, and soon the professor patronized them with cheery and sympathetic talk. But before long the carriage was entered by an Italian military inspector, who examined the soldiers' tickets, and soon there was a fearful uproar, ending apparently in a heavy fine being imposed on the jolliest young man, while the inspector retired growling and muttering in fury. Then the professor and the soldiers talked the matter over, while I did

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not disguise my rather bewildered interest in the scene. Seeing this, the professor smiled at me, and said in excellent English :

" Signora, this young man has a free pass to a certain station, but is guilty of travelling further without military leave, and without a ticket, to eat fish with his friends in Genoa on Sunday." Then he fully explained the case and military regulations, after which I told him how I had been staying with my brother at Fiesole for four months, and after picking up enough Italian I had been a Samaritana nurse at one of the military hospitals. He became quite radiant, and turning with enthusiasm to the soldiers, he introduced me with a fascinating charm and ease of manner to the lads, saying :

" The English lady has been a Samaritana, and has been nursing the maimed in San Domenico."

Thereupon I was greeted with a military salute all round, and because " one touch of nature makes the whole world kin," from that moment I became part of the little company,

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and the kindly professor, being glad to rub up his English, translated all their cheery talk for my benefit. I was sorry to have to say good-bye when I changed trains at Pisa.

I had an uneventful journey from Pisa to Genoa, and walked the few yards from the station to the Hotel Savoia. I arrived so late at table d'hôte dinner that most people had finished and left the little round tables in the *salle à manger*.

On Sunday morning I came down late to breakfast, having a long and tiring journey before me, and found nearly every one had finished breakfast. On my plate was an egg-spoonful of white sugar in a square paper bag on which was printed the name of the hotel.

My train for Modane on the frontier was due to start from Genoa at 11.45 a.m., and shortly before that hour I was waiting in the hall for the hotel porter to wheel my trunk and baggage to the station.

It so happened that the great trains, both to Modane and to Paris, were crowded with French and Italian soldiers and officers, and

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British sailors and soldiers and officers; and, besides myself, there were only two or three English ladies in the train, all connected with the Red Cross or military hospitals.

At Modane we put our watches back an hour to French time. Every one turned out of the train, and our luggage was passed through the customs with little trouble. When the train for Paris was nearly due I stood loaded with baggage in a large queue, waiting for admittance to the passport office, where I deposited one of my photographs. I had not a spare finger, but a Red Cross lady behind me said part of a warrior's kit had caught in my hair, which was hanging in elf-locks on my shoulders. I knew I was looking a deplorable object, but was helpless, and I fancy when she made a feeble but vain effort to tuck it up for me, she thought it was false.

"I know it looks perfectly appalling," I said. "But, though there is not much, it won't fall off."

Whereupon every one near us laughed. Then seeing how small and slight I was, and how

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horribly I was being crushed, a British voice called out :

" Ladies first ! "

But I said loudly :

" Certainly not. Soldiers first ! They have earned the right of way."

After Modane, I stood in the corridor watching the mountains before the Mont Cenis tunnel, and a nice French-speaking Italian told me much about the country we were passing through.

On the morning of the 12th February, before we reached Paris, where we were due at 8.15 a.m., I gave Cook's note to his Interpreter, who was a great comfort to me in every way. My brother had employed him before, and I knew something of his history.

There happened to be a coal strike in Paris, so the bedrooms were only warmed by central heating a short time before dinner, and the only heat downstairs was from a blazing fire in the narrow vestibule outside of the great reading-room. Out of doors the temperature was five degrees below freezing. The Seine was

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thinly frozen over and all fountains were frost-bound.

I was too tired to do anything but walk down the Avenue de l'Opéra as far as the Louvre, and get my tickets for Southampton at Cook's. Then I returned to my room and wanted to lie down on my bed and rest till time to dress for dinner. But to my astonishment I found a large square pillow in a very dirty pillow-case at the *foot* of the bed outside of the quilt. I rang for the chambermaid, but no one came, and being unused to a speaking-tube did not unhook one from the wall, and only heard an indistinct roar in it. So I rang again till a porter came, who told me what I ought to have done. Of course our dialogue was in French.

"Will you kindly go to the tube," I said, "and tell them about my mistake." He did so.

"What do they say?" I asked.

"Madame," he said, smiling grimly, "their language is quite untranslatable, but will Madame tell me her requirements?"

"Look at that pillow-case," I said. "It is perfectly filthy!"

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" That is true, madame," he acquiesced.

" Will you kindly get me another one at once ? " I said.

" But no, madame, I will not," he said quietly.

" What do you mean ? " I demanded, beginning to feel irate.

" There is a pillow in a dirty case on the foot of every bed in the hotel, madame. That," he added, " is to remind travellers that there is a coal strike in Paris, and the laundresses cannot wash with cold water. The pillow-cases have been made extra dirty to prevent travellers from putting their heads on them. Madame will find all the tablecloths dirty in the *salle à manger.*"

Luckily the sheets were clean, and I had with me a nice little cushion, so I rested well, and later had a good night.

On February 13th I was on the train for Havre, where we would have to spend twelve hours. It was a beautiful morning. The snow on the ground was four inches deep.

Guided by my kindly given directions, the result of personal experience, and, in spite of

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my grey hair, I walked to the Girls' Friendly Society, No. 13 Rue Fontenelle. My trunks had been registered through from Paris, but I got a man to take my hand-baggage from the station. Miss Jay received me most kindly, let me rest all day in a nice warm room, gave me hot water, and ample and excellent plain lunch, tea, and supper for four francs, though of course I gave more than I was asked for.

In the afternoon I walked to the docks, and into the church of Ste. Marie de Grace, and engaged a boy, whom I found playing in a slummy side street, to carry my hand-baggage to the docks later.

I got to the docks early, and had my passport examined, and luggage passed through the customs, and then went on board the *Normania*.

I had a berth in a cabin with a handsome white-haired Dutch lady, who had been working for a year in the Dutch Ambulance in Paris, and was on her way to England for a holiday.

We sailed at twelve, midnight, and had a smooth passage, though many people were ill. No one on board undressed. On the 14th Feb-

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ruary I had breakfast on board, in the harbour at Southampton, with an English lady living in Paris, whom I had met a couple of days before, another lady, who had been saved a year earlier from a ship which had been torpedoed in the Channel, and a Red Cross lady, who had been head of a convalescent home for officers in Malta, and was now on her way to England to say good-bye to her husband, who was an officer just off for Egypt.

We got into dock about 7.30. I was first ashore, got my luggage and passport examined quickly, drove to Southampton Dock Station at 8.29, changed trains at Romsey, and reached home about 12.30 p.m.

THE END

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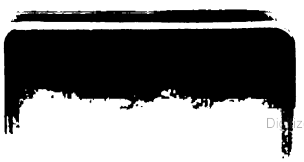
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